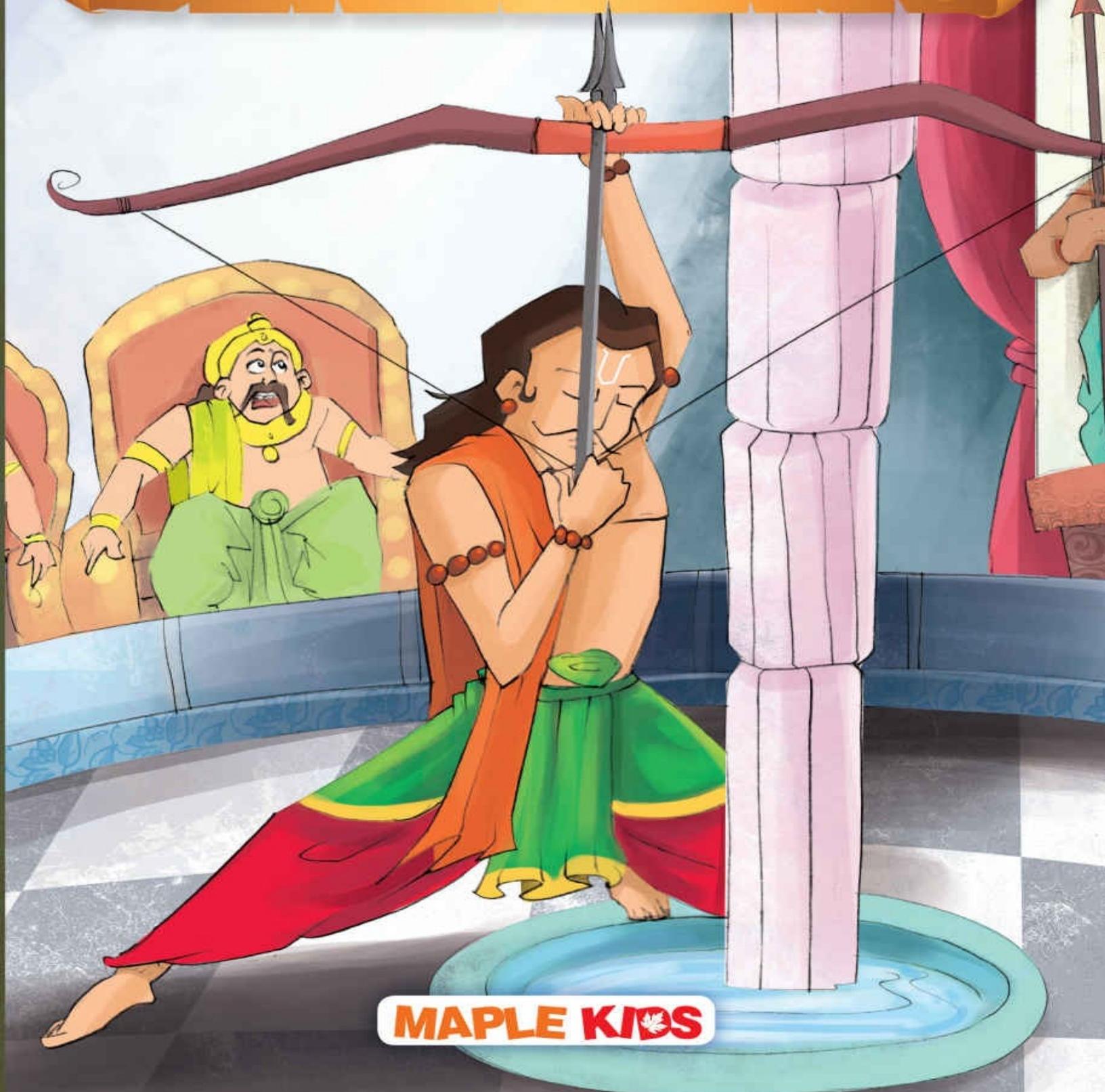


# Famous Illustrated Tales of **MAHABHARATA**



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**Famous**

# Illustrated Tales of **Mahabhatta**



Maple Press

Published by



**Maple Press Pvt. Ltd.**

A-63, Sector-58, Noida (UP) 201 301, India  
Tel. : (0120) 4553581, 4553583

Email: [info@maplepress.co.in](mailto:info@maplepress.co.in)

Website: [www.maplepress.co.in](http://www.maplepress.co.in)

Edition: 2015

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Printed by Artxel, Noida

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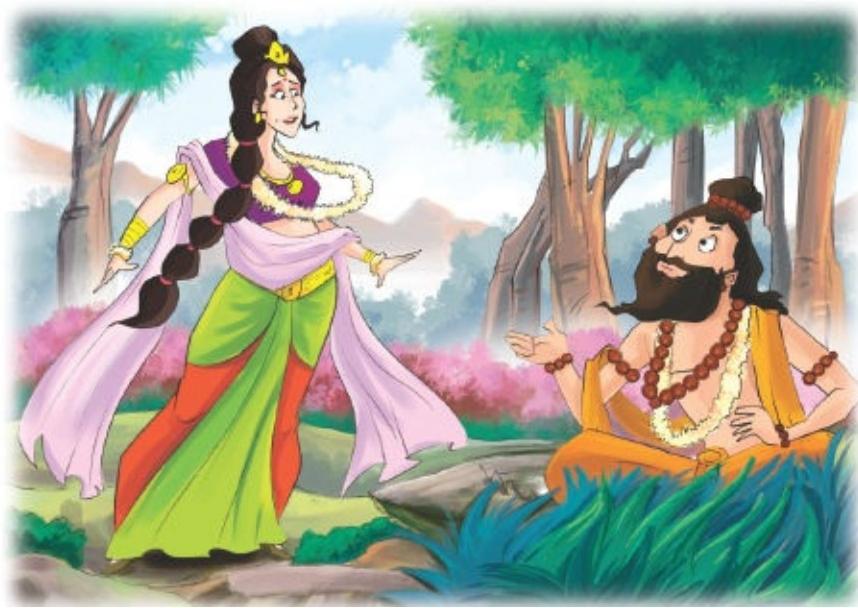
## Vishwamitra and Menaka

Long long ago, Rishi Vishwamitra was performing a great penance. Vishwamitra was a great sage. It was said that the penance that he was doing would give him ultimate power over the kingdom of Earth and Heaven.

Indra, the king of the gods was afraid that if Vishwamitra successfully completed the penance he would achieve so much power that he would be able to fight with Indra and drive him away from Heaven. So he decided to distract Vishwamitra and therefore force him to stop doing the penance.

In Indra's celestial court, there lived a very beautiful woman named Menaka. Menaka was so beautiful that anyone who gazed at her eyes would fall in love with her. Indra said to Menaka, "Rishi Vishwamitra is doing a tough penance. If he succeeds, he would be more powerful than the gods. Go to him and distract his meditation so that the penance is left unfinished. Come back only when you have finished this task."

Menaka came to Earth and went to the forest where Vishwamitra sat meditating with his eyes closed. Menaka had a beautiful voice and she was a talented dancer. She sang and danced around Vishwamitra. She made a garland out of wild flowers and put it around Vishwamitra's neck. Vishwamitra opened his eyes and saw Menaka. He was amazed by her beauty.



Vishwamitra asked Menaka to marry him. She agreed and they were married. A beautiful daughter was born to them. But it was time for Menaka to leave the Earth and go back to Heaven as she was ordered by Indra. She had successfully managed to make Vishwamitra stop doing his penance. Vishwamitra could not finish his penance because he had married Menaka.

Menaka left for Heaven, leaving a sad Vishwamitra behind. After Menaka left, Vishwamitra was very upset that because of her, he could not complete the penance. He refused to accept the child as his daughter. He left her near some bushes and went deeper into the forest.



The baby lay alone in the forest for many hours before Rishi Kanva passed by the bush. He heard the baby's screams and found her lying under the bush. Many Shakunta birds were flying around her. Rishi Kanva was amazed at how the birds protected the baby. He realized that this was no ordinary baby.

He brought the baby to his ashram and named her after the birds which had protected her. Thus, she was called Shakuntala. Shakuntala grew up at rishi Kanva's ashram. Though she was simple, she was very beautiful. Everyone loved her for she had a sweet voice and good manners.

# Shakuntala

Shakuntala grew up in Rishi Kanva's ashram. She grew up to be a very beautiful woman. Once, the great king of the region, King Dushyanta, was chasing a deer while on a hunting trip in the forest. After riding through the forest for sometime he came to the ashram. Shakuntala was plucking some flowers in the garden when the king caught sight of her.

Soon the king lost his heart to Shakuntala's beauty and grace. He proposed to marry Shakuntala and they were married secretly. Dushyanta stayed overnight and left for his capital city. He promised to Shakuntala, "I must bid you good bye now, but I shall come back and take you with me to the royal palace. Till then, keep this ring with you and never lose it." Shakuntala promised never to lose Dushyanta's ring.

The king left. For many months passed after that she kept dreaming about him. Shakuntala began to daydream about king Dushyanta so much that she forgot to do her household chores. One day, Rishi Durvasa visited the ashram. Shakuntala forgot to perform the rituals while welcoming the great sage. She forgot to wash his feet and give him food as she was sitting lost in her thoughts about the king. This made Durvasa very angry. He cursed her saying, "You have treated me very badly. I curse you that whoever you are thinking of will forget everything about you. He would not recognize you when you meet him."



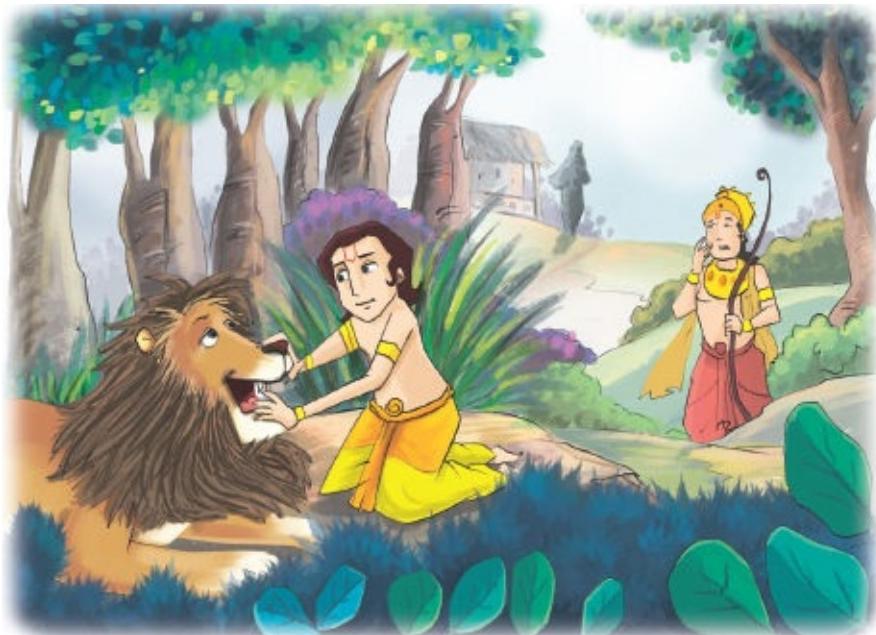
Shakuntala, having realized her mistake fell at Rishi Durvasa's feet. She said, "O great saint, I am very sorry for mistreating you. kindly forgive me." When Rishi Durvasa learnt the truth about Shakuntala and king Dushyanta, he understood her condition. He calmed down and said, "I cannot take back my curse, but I can bless you that your husband shall remember everything once you show him the ring that he has given to you."

Rishi Durvasa's curse took effect and for many months the king did not return to take Shakuntala to his royal palace. He had completely forgotten about her. Shakuntala was beginning to get impatient as she was about to have the king's child. Finally, one day, she decided to go to Dushyanta's palace herself.

She set off for the city. On the way she had to cross a river. As Shakuntala was sitting in the boat, she fell asleep because she was tired. She did not notice as the ring which Dushyanta had given her, slipped from her finger and fell into the water. A fish was swimming by just then. Thinking that it was a worm the fish quickly swallowed the ring and swam away.

When Shakuntala reached the king's palace, she realized she had lost the ring. Dushyanta refused to recognize her as he was under Rishi Durvasa's curse. There was nothing Shakuntala could do. Disappointed, she came back to the forest and began living in a small hut, all by herself. There in the dense forest, she gave birth to a beautiful son. He was named Bharata.

Bharata had no friends because he lived in the forest. Thus he made friends with the birds and the animals and often played with them. Meanwhile in the city, a fisherman had caught the fish that had swallowed the ring. When he cut the fish apart, he found the ring bearing the royal symbol. The fisherman ran through the market and reached the palace. There he presented the ring to the king. Miraculously, when King Dushyanta held the ring in his hand, he remembered about Shakuntala. He felt very sorry for having treated his wife in such a cruel way. He set off on his horse, in search for his wife.



When King Dushyanta reached the forest where Shakuntala lived, he saw a young boy there. The boy had pushed open a lion's mouth and was counting its teeth. The king was amazed at Bharata's bravery and strength. He asked the boy, where his mother was, so Bharata took Dushyanta to his mother. King Dushyanta's joys knew no bounds. He was glad to have found Shakuntala again. He brought them back to his palace. Many years after King Dushyanta had ruled, Bharata became the king of the kingdom. Because Bharata ruled such a vast kingdom with great honour, today, we also call our land as Bharatavarsha.

## King Shibi and The Vulture

Many years after Bharata's rule, King Shibi became the ruler of the vast kingdom of India. King Shibi was a pious king who had performed many sacred rituals. One day as the king was performing one such ritual, a pigeon fell from the sky onto his lap. In fact, a vulture was chasing it. The pigeon said, "O great king. A vulture wants to kill me and eat me. I have been flying away from him for many hours now. I cannot fly anymore. Please save me my life."

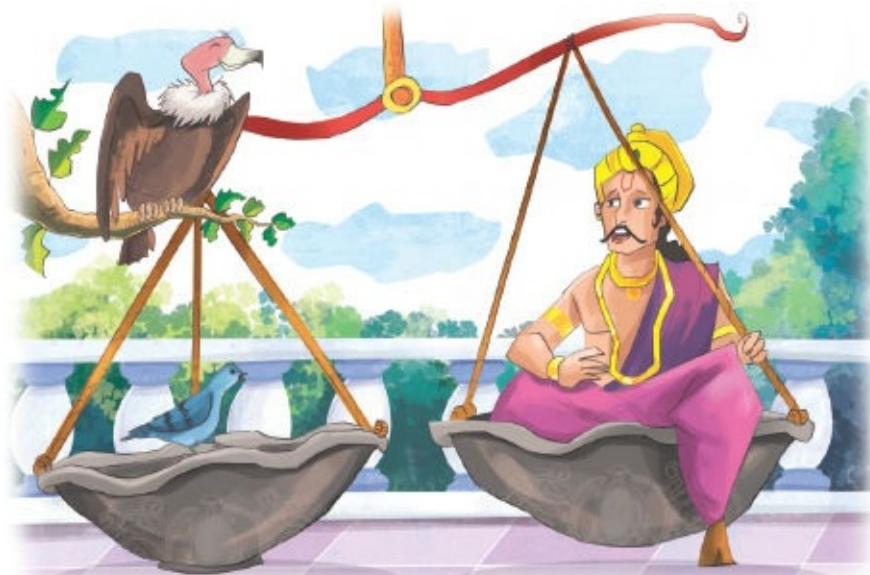
The king assured the pigeon that he would protect it from the vulture. Soon the pigeon came under the king's custody. On seeing the pigeon being guarded by the king it said, "Great king, I am starving for many days. That pigeon is my food. Please return it to me." But King Shibi said, "This pigeon is trembling with fear. It has come to me for protection. Therefore, it would not be proper for me to give it to you. It is a sin not to protect those who come seeking protection and I cannot commit such a sin."

The Vulture said, "O king, all creatures must eat to live. I am starving for a long time. If I don't eat the pigeon, I shall die. If I die, who will feed my children? They too shall die of hunger. Therefore, if you do not return the pigeon to me, you shall be responsible for my children's death as well as mine. Do you not consider it to be a sin? Would you be so unfair to me to save this pigeon?"



The king replied, "If it is food that you want I shall be happy to provide you with anything that you would like to eat. My kitchens are stocked with fresh hunt. I shall give you fine rabbit meat or deer meat in exchange for this pigeon. You shall not die of hunger because I will take care that you get the best food available in this city."

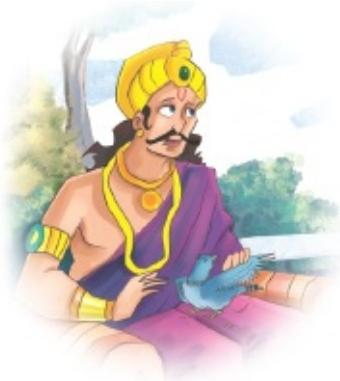
But the Vulture said, "I do not want to eat anything from your kitchen. It is the pigeon that I wish to eat. If at all you must make an exchange, I shall agree to let go of the pigeon only after you have given me flesh from your body weighing equally as the pigeon."



The king readily agreed. A big balance was set up. The pigeon was placed on one side of it and a large chunk of flesh from the king's right thigh was placed on the other. But the pigeon weighed more than the flesh. So the king cut a large chunk of flesh from his right arm and placed it on the balance.

To everyone's astonishment, the Vulture still weighed more. The king went on separating flesh from his body and placing it on the balance but the pigeon continued to get heavier and heavier. Finally Shibi was tired. He dropped his sword and sat down on the balance himself. He said, "You can have the whole of me. I hereby offer my life to you."

There was a bright flash of light and in place of the pigeon and the vulture stood Agni, the god of fire, and Indra, the god of thunder and rain. Indra said, "We had transformed ourselves as the pigeon and the vulture to test your righteousness O, great king and you have pleased us with your sacrifice." Indra and Agni blessed king Shibi. Through his sacrifice, Shibi became one of the great examples of righteousness and selflessness.



# Kunti

Lord Krishna's grandfather Yadava Shoorsena ruled over Avanti. He had a cousin called Kunti Bhoja who ruled the kingdom of Kunti. He did not have any children. So Shoorsena promised his cousin that he shall give his first child to him. When a daughter was born to him, he named her Pritha and handed her to King Kunti Bhoja. Pritha was then named Kunti after the kingdom she was brought up in. She grew up to be a very beautiful woman.

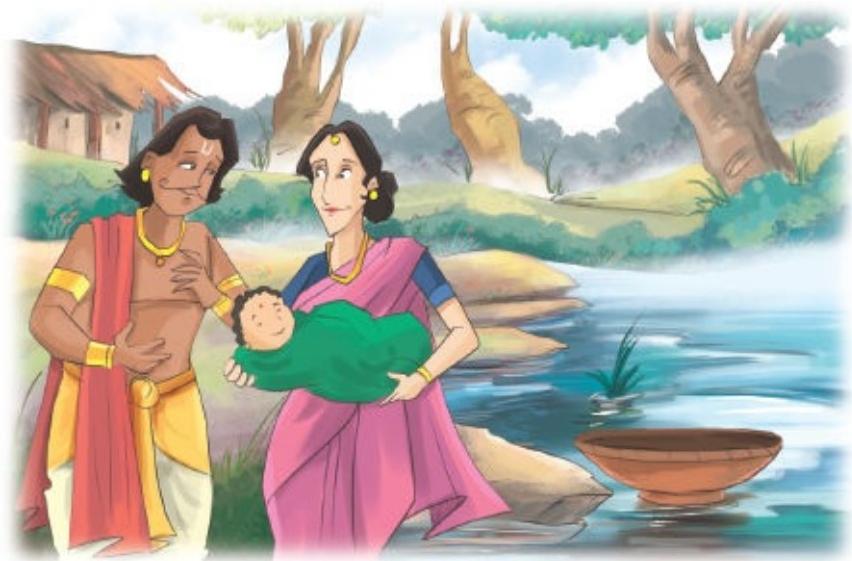
One day the great sage, Rishi Durvasa came to stay at the royal palace of Kingdom Kunti. Kunti served him with great devotion. Durvasa, who is known in the Mahabharata for his quick and huge temper, was so pleased with Kunti that he offered to teach her a sacred mantra. He said, "Beautiful Kunti, since you are so humble and noble, it is only fitting that you be blessed with divine children. Every time you chant this mantra, you will be blessed with a son from one of the gods. I am giving the mantra to you, but use it wisely." And Rishi Durvasa taught Kunti the mantra.

Kunti was very happy to be blessed by Durvasa. But she wanted to test the mantra. So one day, she secretly went to the banks of a river nearby and prayed to Sun god. Then she chanted the mantra. The rays of the sun shone brightly upon her and a child appeared in her arms. It was a beautiful little boy. It had golden armour protecting its chest and beautiful golden earrings or kundals on each of its ears. Kunti was overjoyed at the sight of the little boy. She kissed it again and again in pleasure.



But then Kunti thought, "I cannot take this child back to the palace. I am unmarried. If people find out I have a son it will bring my family a bad name. I must leave the baby here and hope some person will find him and take care of him." She made a basket and put the baby in it. She kissed her little son for the last time and let the basket float in the river. Then with tears in her eyes she came back to her palace.

The boy lay in the basket for a long time and the current took him downstream. A charioteer named Adhiratha and his wife Radha lived here. They did not have any children, so when they saw the baby boy floating in a basket in the river, they were overjoyed for having been blessed with a son. They rescued the baby from the river and named him Kama. From that day, Karna grew up as their son.



Because Karna was no ordinary boy but a blessing to Kunti from the Sun god himself, he was very gifted as a warrior since he was a child.

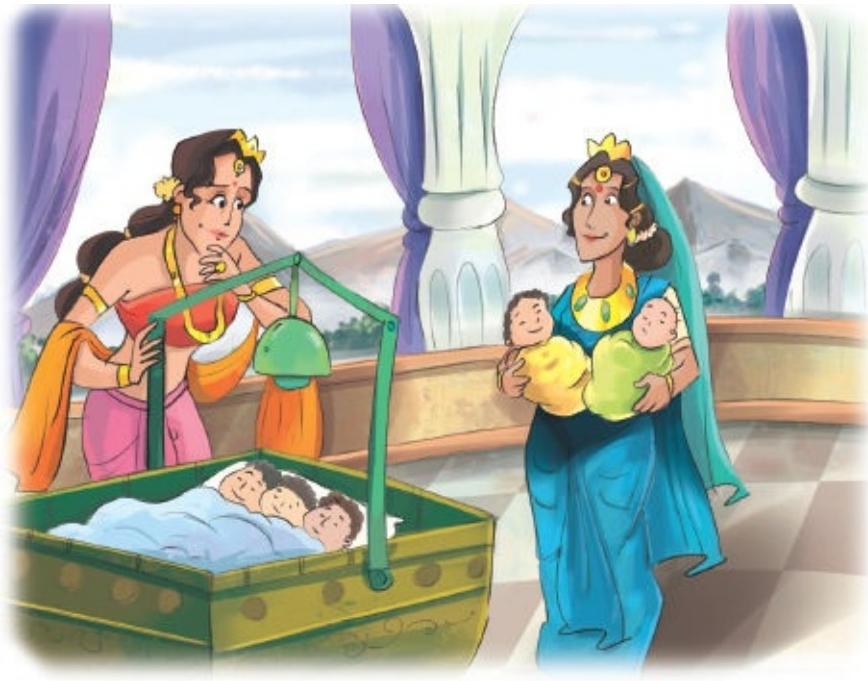
Kunti later married King Pandu of Hastinapur. She used the mantra for three more times, thus getting blessed with three more sons who along with Pandu's second wife's children were called the Pandavas. Kama grew up to be a great warrior and fought with the Kauravas, against his own brothers - the Pandavas, in the battle of Kurukshetra.

## Pandavas and Kauravas

Three princes were born to Vichitravirya, the king of Hastinapur. They were called, Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura. Since Vidura was the son of not a queen but a servant woman, he was never considered for the throne of Hastinapur. However, Vidura was a great scholar who was well read in the scriptures. Thus, he was appointed as the prime minister of the kingdom.

Pandu became the king of Hastinapur after Vichitravirya, and got married to princess Kunti, the adopted daughter of King Kunti Bhoja who ruled the Kingdom of Kunti. Pandu also married princess Madri of Madra kingdom. Dhritarashtra who was blind from birth married Gandhari, the princess of Gandhar. Gandhari was a dutiful wife. When she found out that her husband was blind, she tied her eyes with a piece of silk, saying that she did not wish to see the world as her husband could not see.

Kunti, after she married Pandu, used the mantra given to her by Rishi Durvasa to invoke Yama, the god of judgement, Vayu, the god of wind and Indra, the god of rain and thunder. Thus, she was blessed with Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna. When Madri found out that King Pandu was incapable of having a child, because of a curse, she begged Kunti to teach her the mantra. Kunti taught Madri the mantra and Madri invoked Ashvin, the twin gods of sunrise and sunset. Thus, she was blessed with the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva. The sons of King Pandu, together, began to be called as the Pandavas.



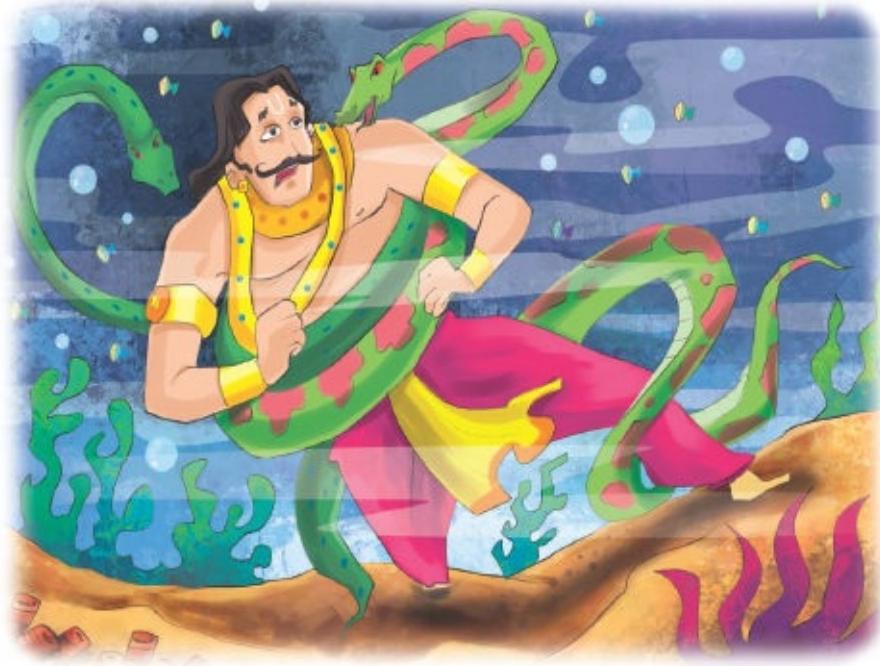
Gandhari wished for hundred sons and a daughter. Once, Rishi Vyasa came to spend some time at Hastinapur. Gandhari served him with lot of devotion. Thus, with his blessings, she received hundred sons and a daughter. When her eldest son Duryodhana was born, all the animals in the forest began to howl. The ground shook and the clouds darkened the sky. It was then predicted that the child was capable of great evil and that he would grow up to bring bad luck to his clan. With Duryodhana, Gandhari's sons came to be known as the Kauravas.

The Pandavas and the Kauravas grew up together. Duryodhana believed that his father, Dhritarashtra deserved to sit on the throne of Hastinapur as king, but Pandu was chosen instead because Dhritarashtra was blind. This made him very jealous of his five cousins. He took every opportunity to harm them.

Duryodhana knew that Bhima had a weakness for food. One day he invited Bhima to share some sweets with him. But he had cleverly mixed poison with the sweets that he offered to Bhima. Bhima did not suspect Duryodhana and ate the sweets with great relish. But no sooner had he eaten them he fell unconscious to the ground. Duryodhana then threw him in the river Ganga and ran away.

For a long time no one noticed that Bhima was missing. When they finally realized that he was nowhere to be seen, a search party was sent to look for him. Meanwhile, poor Bhima was carried by the current to a lake. Many poisonous snakes lived in that lake. They began to bite the unconscious Bhima. But

miraculously, their poison began to counter the poison from the sweets that Bhima had eaten. It began to cure Bhima. He opened his eyes and slowly swam to the shore and then walked back to the palace.



There are many such incidents when the Kauravas have tried to seek revenge from the Pandavas. Duryodhana continued to look for opportunities to kill the Pandavas until he himself was killed in the great battle of Kurukshetra.

# Hidimba

The Pandavas walked in the forest for a long time. Finally, they came upon a little clearing. Kunti said, "Let us rest here as it is getting dark. We shall continue our journey tomorrow. But the Pandavas did not know that, that part of the forest belonged to a cruel demon called Hidimba. Hidimba had noticed that the Pandavas had come to his forest and were now resting in a clearing. He said to his sister, "Hidimbi, go and check up our new guests. Count how many of them are there. We shall have a very good dinner tonight as we shall eat them."

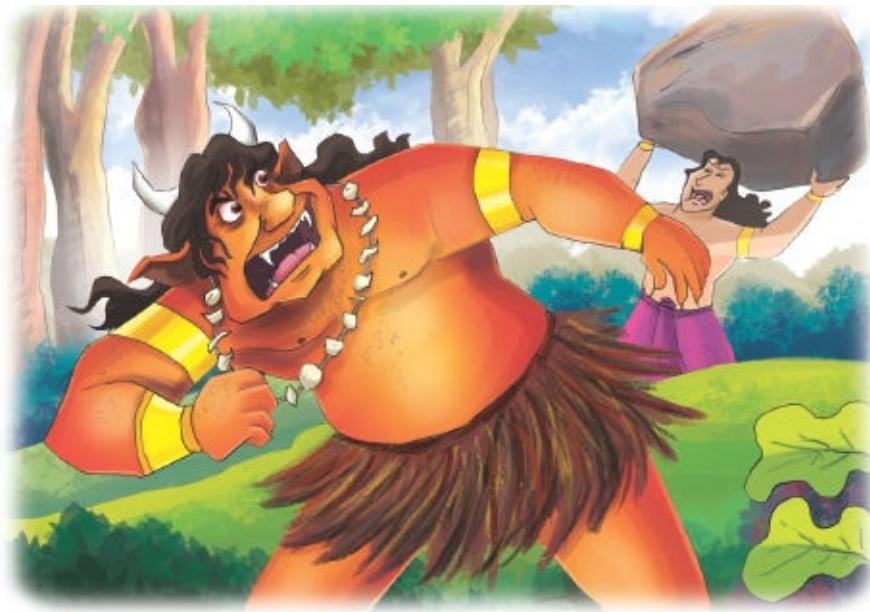
Hidimbi was equally excited as her brother. She went to the forest and came to the clearing where the Pandavas were resting. But when Hidimbi's eyes fell upon Bhima, she was amazed by the beautiful youth. Bhima was large and very well built. He slept like a mountain in the moon shine and snored like the thunder. Hidimbi could not take her eyes off the sleeping prince. She knew she had fallen in love with Bhima.

Hidimbi took the shape of a beautiful woman and came to Bhima. Bhima woke up and was very surprised to see a beautiful woman in the forest. He said, "Who are you? Where did you come from?" Hidimbi said, "I am a demon. My name is Hidimbi. I am the sister of the king of this forest. Hidimba, my brother had sent me to check how many of you were here so that we may arrange for dinner accordingly. He plans to kill you all and eat you."



When Bhima learnt that Hidimbi was a demon he was not afraid at all. In fact, Bhima was quite impressed by her honesty. He said, "I shall meet your brother and talk to him. Please take me to him." So Hidimbi took Bhima to Hidimba. Bhima had wanted to politely request Hidimba to let them go. But when he met Hidimba, he realized that Hidimba was not someone who could be convinced by polite words. Hidimba challenged Bhima to a fight. Bhima accepted it.

A deadly fight began between the demon king and Bhima. They uprooted huge trees and threw it at each other. Then they lifted large rocks and fought with them. Then Bhima grabbed Hidimba's leg and swung him round and round before dashing him to the ground. After a long and dreadful fight, Bhima killed Hidimba.



When Kunti and the rest of the Pandavas woke up, they found Bhima standing over the dead Hidimba. Kunti said, "Hidimbi has been very brave to save our lives. We must grant whatever she asks from us."

Hidimbi said, "Mother, I only wish to marry the great Bhima." So with Kunti's blessings, Bhima married Hidimbi that night. They stayed in that forest for a few days after which Bhima and Hidimbi had a son. He was half demon and half human and was called Ghatotkacha. Then Bhima named Ghatotkacha as the king of the forest and moved on with his mother and brothers.

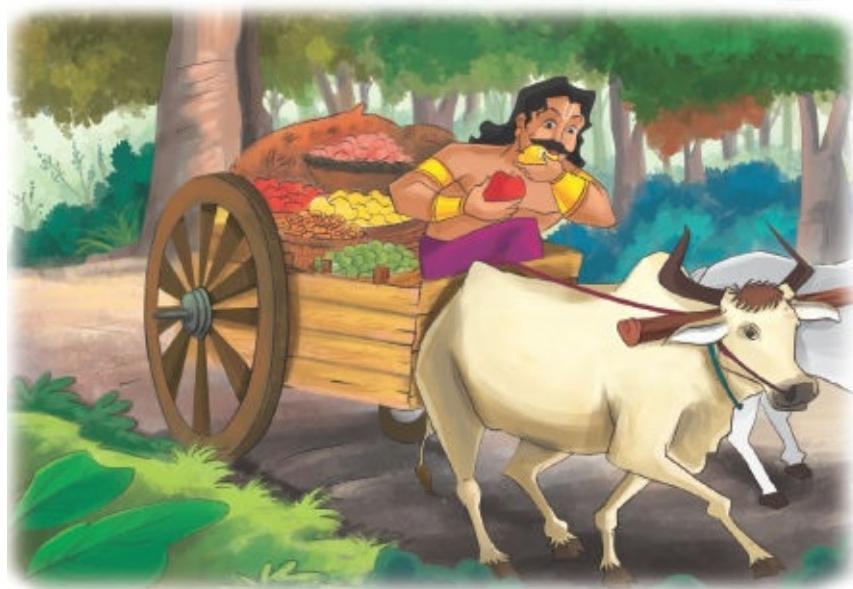
Ghatotkacha had great magical powers. Later in the great battle of Kurukshetra, he fought on the side of the Pandavas and died a heroic death.

## The Pandavas in Ekachakra

After the Pandavas and Kunti left Hidimbi and her son Ghatotkacha, they walked for some days in the forest and reached a small town by the forest. The town was indeed a small one and was called Ekachakra. The Pandavas decided to take shelter in Ekachakra before continuing with their journey.

Many kind people lived in this town. A Brahmin family offered to shelter the Pandavas and Kunti until they decided to move on. The Pandavas would go from door to door begging for alms and in the evening, their mother would divide whatever they had collected amongst themselves. Soon they became famous in Ekachakra because of their virtuous nature.

But one day Kunti heard her hosts crying piteously. She asked the Brahmin's wife what was the reason for their sorrow? The wife said, "Sister, a very cruel and powerful demon lives just outside Ekachakra. His name is Bakasura. When he had come to the town, he killed many people and destroyed the crops and cattle. We were worried that he would end up killing us all. So we promised to send him a cart full of food every day. But whoever drives the cart to Bakasura's den never comes back. Tomorrow is my husband's turn to take the cart to Bakasura. O sister, tell me, what shall I do if my husband is dead?" And the Brahmin's wife began to weep loudly.



The Brahmin said, "Everyone must die one day. If I have to die to protect my family and the people of this town I must do it without hesitation." At this, his wife started weeping more loudly.

Kunti said to the Brahmin, "I appreciate your courage and honour. But I have a solution to this problem. Tomorrow, instead of you, my son Bhima shall take the cart of food to Bakasura." But the Brahmin and his wife began to plead, "Sister, Bakasura is a dangerous demon. He does not spare anyone. Bhima is like our own son. How can we let him drive the cart to Bakasura's den knowing that Bakasura will kill him? We beg you, do not send the boy."



But Kunti was certain of what she was doing. She said, "My son Bhima is no ordinary boy. Let him drive the cart to Bakasura tomorrow and you shall see." So the next day, a cart was loaded with food and prepared for the journey. Bhima touched his mother's feet and took her blessings. Then he set off for Bakasura's den.

As Bhima drove the cart through the forest he could not resist the tempting smell of the delicious food. He lifted the cover and took a piece of bread from the cart and began to chew it. He thought, "This food is delicious. I must stop here for a while and have a little picnic." So he stopped the cart and began eating the rest of the food in the cart.

By the time he reached Bakasura's den, it was past noon. Bakasura had been

waiting impatiently for the food. When he saw Bhima driving an empty cart towards him he roared with anger, "How dare you come so late? Where is my food?" Bhima said, "I am really sorry. I could not resist the delicious food that was being sent for you. So I stopped the cart for a while and had a little picnic." When Bakasura heard this he went red with anger. "You petty man, I will show you what happens when you dare to make the great Bakasura angry." And Bakasura pounced on Bhima. Bhima too jumped on Bakasura. A big fight broke out. It went on for a long time. Bhima was blessed with never ending energy because he was the son of the wind god, Vayu. But Bakasura began to get tired. Finally, he lay down at Bhima's feet and accepted defeat. Bhima put his foot on Bakasura's chest and with a tremendous force, he killed the mighty Bakasura.

When people of Ekachakra learnt that Bakasura was dead, their joy knew no bounds. They celebrated for a whole week and blessed the brave Bhima and his mother, Kunti. Later Kunti said to the Pandavas, "People in this town now know that we are no ordinary travellers. It is no longer safe for us here, we must move on." The Pandavas agreed to their mother's advice and they left Ekachakra early next morning to set off for the forest.

## Karna and Parashuram

**K**arna, having left by his mother Kunti, grew up under the care of his foster parents Adhiratha and Radha. Though Karna was being brought up by a charioteer, the fact that he was a prince by birth could not be hidden. As a child, Karna was exceptionally talented with the use of bow and arrow. When he grew up, he wanted to take further training from Parashurama, the master of all astras, shastras and divine weapons.

However, Parashurama accepted only sons of Brahmins as his students. Since Karna was not a Brahmin, he knew that Parashurama would never accept him as a student. But Karna was desperate. He knew he must take instructions from Parashurama in order to improve his skills with the weapons. So he disguised himself as a Brahmin and went to Parashurama's ashram.

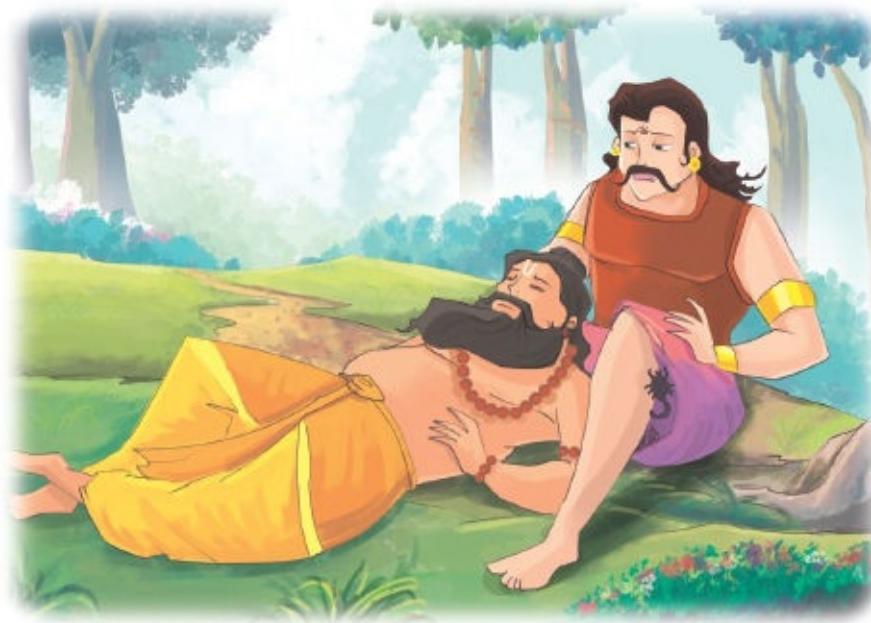
Parashurama was impressed by Karna's talent with the bow and arrow. He readily accepted Karna as his student. For many months after that Karna learnt the martial arts from Parashurama. He was a bright student. Thus, his guru was very happy with him. Gradually, Karna became Parashurama's favourite student.

One day Parashurama was sleeping with his head on Karna's lap. Karna sat upright, under a large banyan tree and guarded his sleeping guru. Suddenly a large insect crawled to Karna from somewhere and began biting into his thigh. The sharp teeth of the insect continued chewing into Karna's thigh but Karna did not move. He knew that a slightest movement would wake his guru. So Karna sat in the same position like a stone and bore all the pain.



But blood began to slowly ooze from Karna's thigh. The warm blood touched Parashurama's cheek. It made him wake up and find that his student had been bitten by a poisonous insect.

Parashurama was astonished by Karna's power of tolerance. He asked, "Son, tell me truthfully, who are you? A Brahmin cannot suffer so much physical pain. It takes a true Kshatriya, a man from the warrior caste, to tolerate so much pain."



Karna could no more lie to his guru. He bowed to his guru and said, "Master, I had lied to you. I am no Brahmin. I am the son of the Charioteer Adhiratha. I

lied because had I not, you would not have accepted me as your student.”

Parashurama’s eyes were glowing with anger. He said, “I am ashamed my own student has cheated me. I curse you Karna, that when the time comes, none of the things that I have taught you will help you.”

On the seventeenth day of the great battle of Kurukshetra, Karna is killed by Arjuna when his chariot wheel sinks in the mud and he forgets how to use his weapons.

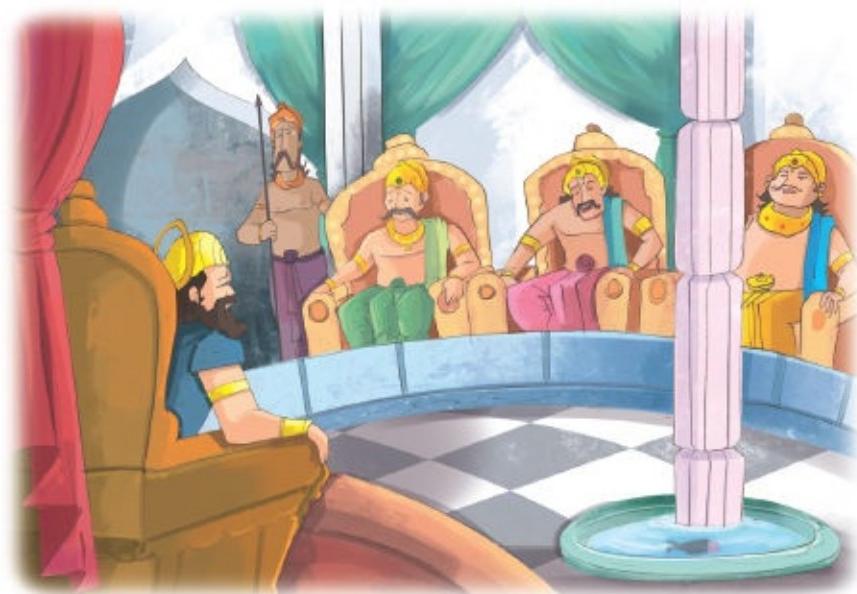
## Draupadi's Swayamvara

The next day the Pandavas and Kunti bade farewell to their Brahmin host of Ekachakra and set out for Kampilya, the capital city of the kingdom of Panchal. The great kingdom of Panchal was ruled by King Drupada.

On their way the Pandavas learnt that king Drupad was hosting a Swayamvara for his daughter Draupadi. The Pandavas had heard of Draupadi's beauty and grace. So they disguised themselves as Brahmins and set off to take part in the Swayamvara.

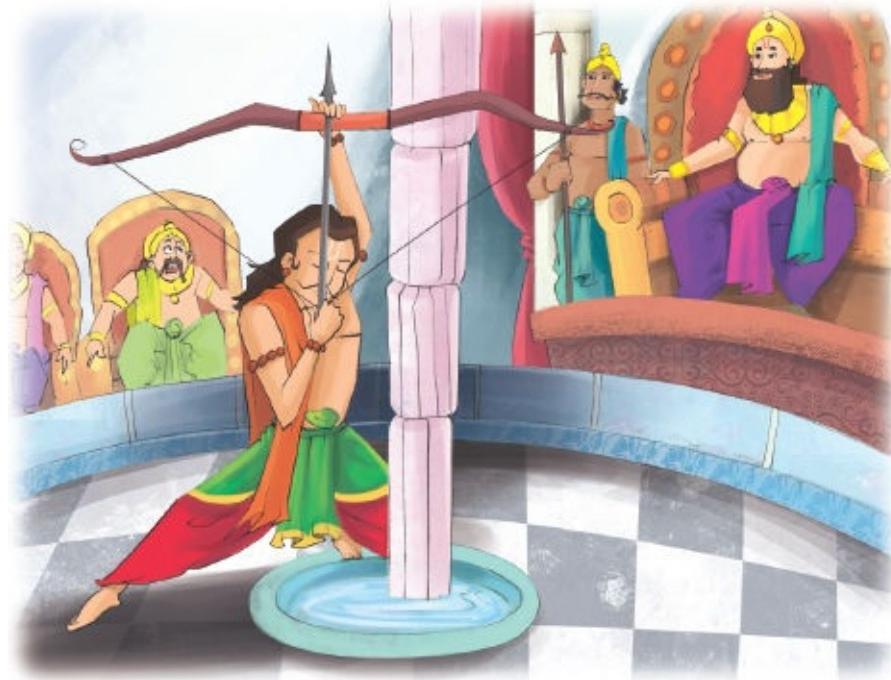
The Swayamvara that was being held in Panchal was a tough competition. The reward was the princess of Panchal whom the winner shall get to marry. Many eligible princes had gathered in Panchal that day for the Swayamvara. A large pole was set up in the royal courtyard. A vessel full of clear water was placed below it. On the top of the pole, a small wooden fish was attached to a machine which made it rotate.

Dhristyadumna, Draupadi's brother and the prince of Panchal announced, "Whoever shall be able to string this bow and hit the fish's eye by looking at its reflection in the water, shall win my sister Draupadi as his bride." It was a tough task indeed for many princes came forward to try. But they all failed.



Draupadi was a beautiful princess and the stories about her virtue were very popular in the countries far and wide. So everyone present at the Swayamvara that day wished to marry her. But to their sorrow, none of them could successfully do this difficult task. Some of them could not even lift the bow and string. Those who could string it could not properly shoot an arrow by using it. Some of the arrows narrowly missed the fish's eye.

Then Arjuna got up from his seat and walked to the bow. He skillfully put the string on the bow and shot an arrow by looking at the vessel below the pole. Everyone wondered as the arrow hit the fish's eye. King Drupad asked, "Who are you O great Brahmin?" Arjuna said, "I am Arjuna, son of king Pandu and the prince of Hastinapur." Of course, Drupad knew how great an archer Arjuna was. His happiness knew no bounds as he got Draupadi married to Arjuna.



The Pandavas and their mother Kunti were living with a poor potter in Panchal. After the Swayamvara, the brothers along with Draupadi, returned to their mother.

Every day, after the brothers had collected alms, their mother would say, "Whatever you have collected, share it amongst the five of you." Today Yudhisthira jokingly said, "Mother, look what we have brought." Kunti was busy with her household chores. She thought it was alms that he was talking about so she said, "Whatever it is, share it amongst the five of you."

The brothers stood at the doorstep, shocked at what Kunti had said. When Kunti turned to look, she realized she had made a big mistake. The Pandavas were bound to follow their mother's orders. They could not disobey her. So the five Pandavas became husbands of Draupadi and after some time, they returned to Hastinapur with their mother and wife.

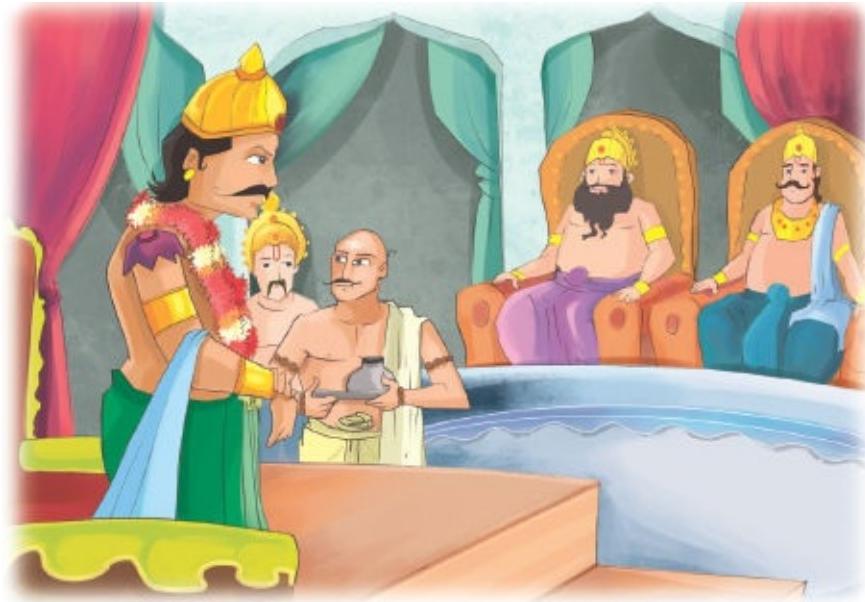


## A Game of Dice

After Arjuna won the hand of Draupadi in the Swayamvara and married her, everyone knew that the Pandavas had escaped the fire in Varnavata. Duryodhana was much displeased with the news. Vidura went to Dhritarashtra and said, "Your majesty, it is indeed unfair and shameful that the Kauravas should try to kill the Pandavas in such a way. We must welcome the Pandavas and Queen mother Kunti back to Hastinapur and give them what they truly deserve." Dhritarashtra said, "I understand what you are saying Vidura. The Pandavas have been treated badly by the Kauravas. Such enmity between the cousins will not have very good effects on Hastinapur's well-being. I shall crown Yudhisthira as the ruler of half of the kingdom of Hastinapur as he deserves it."

Dhritarashtra and Gandhari welcomed the Pandavas, Kunti and Draupadi to Hastinapur. Yudhisthira was crowned the king of Indraprastha. Under his rule, Indraprastha began to grow into a prosperous city. The Pandavas began to live happily in their new kingdom.

But Duryodhana could not bear this. Jealously gripped him, and he went to his maternal uncle for help. Duryodhana's maternal uncle, Shakuni was a cunning man. He owned a pair of dice which were magical. Shakuni was blessed that the dice would give him whichever number he desired. Therefore, Shakuni never lost a game of dice.



The cunning Shakuni advised Duryodhana to invite Yudhisthira for a game of dice. In those days, it was considered disrespectful to refuse an invitation for a game of dice. Yudhisthira had no option but to go to Hastinapur to play. The game began.

Shakuni with his magical dice began winning all the rounds. Slowly Yudhisthira lost all his wealth. Then he lost his kingdom, Indraprastha. Shakuni said, "So king, what would you like to put at stake now? How about you put yourself and your brothers at stake and win everything back?" Yudhisthira put all the five Pandavas at stake. But he lost, and they all became Shakuni's slaves. The Kauravas were enjoying the game very much. Yudhisthira said, "I have nothing else to lose. Let's stop playing now." Shakuni said, "Let us play one more round. You still have Draupadi. You can put her on stake and win everything back."



Seeing that it was his last chance, Yudhisthira agreed. The dice was thrown and Shakuni won the round. Duryodhana roared with joy. He ordered, “Dussasana, go and drag that woman to the court. She is ours now.”

Dussasana, Duryodhana’s younger brother, dragged Draupadi to the court. Duryodhana and Dussasana began to insult Draupadi. Dussasana began to pull one end of Draupadi’s saree as she prayed to Lord Krishna for help. But miraculously, no matter how much Dussasana pulled, the saree never seemed to end. By Lord Krishna’s grace, Draupadi’s honour was saved that day.

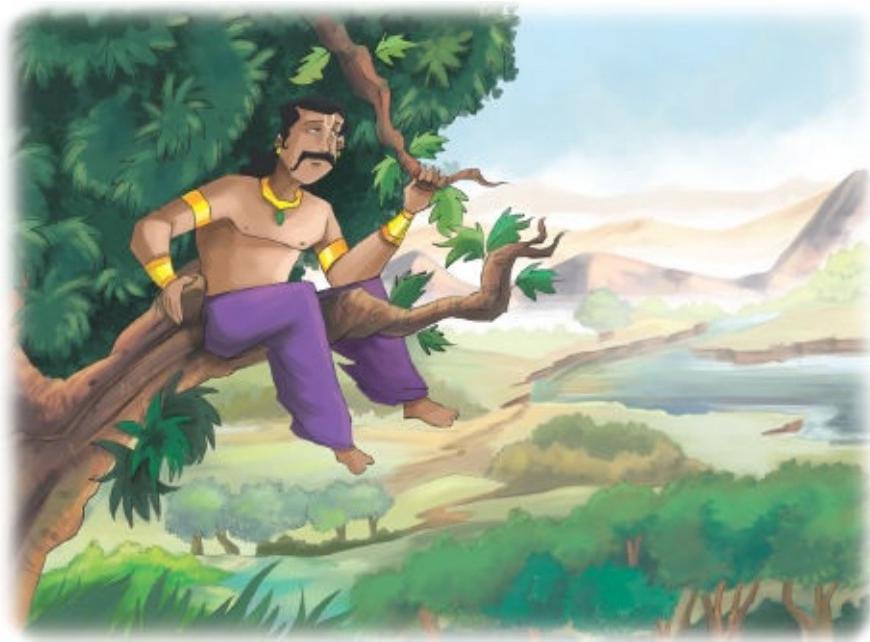
After such misbehaviour by the Kauravas, Dhritarashtra asked Duryodhana to spare the Pandavas. Duryodhana could not disobey as Dhritarashtra was the king. So he ordered the Pandavas to leave Hastinapur for thirteen years and live in the forest. He also said, “The Pandavas must live the thirteenth year in disguise. If I find out where they are hiding, they shall have to live in the forest for thirteen more years.” The Pandavas left Hastinapur again, with Draupadi. They dressed in simple clothes and walked for many days until they came upon the forest called Dwaithavana.

## **Yudhisthira and The Yaksha**

**A**fter losing the game of dice to Shakuni, the Pandavas came upon a forest called Dwaithavana and began living there peacefully. Because of their virtue, they were known and respected by all the sages of the forest. One day a sage came to the Pandavas and said, “I am very troubled. I used to own some arani sticks which I used to light the sacred fire during holy ceremonies. But yesterday a deer ran away carrying the arani sticks with it. I am old. I cannot chase a deer. O’ brave princes, please bring back my fire sticks. I must perform my holy ceremony.”

The Pandavas set off to find the deer. They soon came in sight of the animal. But the deer ran as fast as the wind. The Pandavas could not catch it. It was a hot day. Soon the Pandavas felt thirsty. Yudhisthira asked Nakula to find some water. Nakula climbed a tree and looked around. He found a lake at some distance. He got down from the tree and walked towards the lake to bring back water for his thirsty brothers.

It was a small but a beautiful lake. It was surrounded by thick bushes and trees. Many colourful flowers had bloomed in those bushes. The water in that lake was so clear that one could see the pebbles that were lying at the bottom. Nakula was very thirsty. But just as he had dipped his hands in the lake to drink some water, he heard a voice. It said, “O’ Pandava, this lake belongs to me. Do not drink from this lake.” Nakula was too thirsty to listen to the voice. He could not control his thirst. He drank the water and suddenly felt dizzy.



Meanwhile Yudhisthira kept waiting for Nakula. But when the younger brother did not return he sent Bhima to look for him. Despite the warning he drank the water and fell down unconscious, beside Nakula.

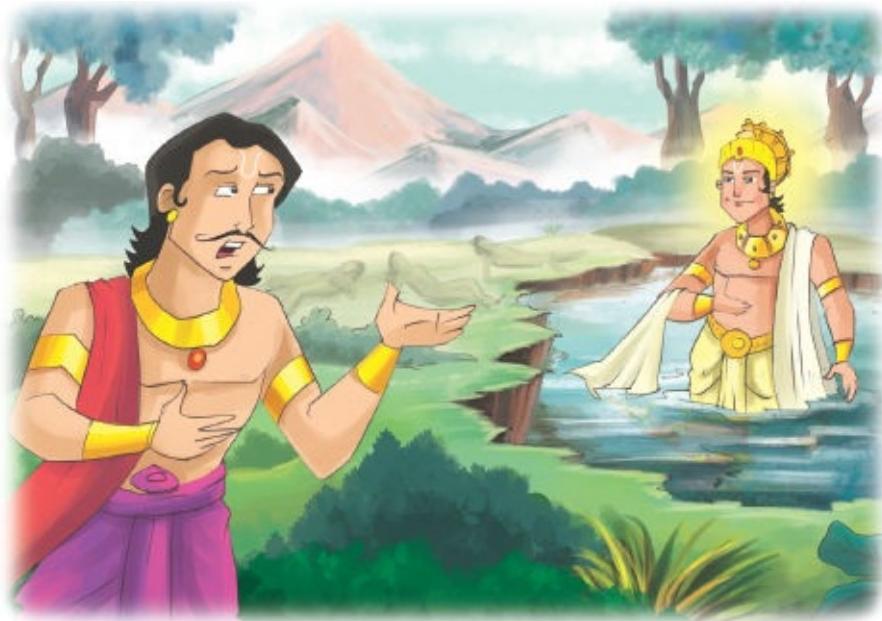
Yudhisthira kept waiting for Bhima, but when he did not return he sent Arjuna to look for him. Arjuna too, met with the same fate, followed by Sahadeva, who went to look for Arjuna. Now only Yudhisthira was left. Tired of waiting, he decided to go look for his brothers. When he came upon the lake he was surprised to find all his brothers lying dead beside the lake.

But just as he was about to drink the water he heard the voice, "O' prince, this is my lake. Do not drink the water from this lake." Yudhisthira did not drink the water. He asked, "Who are you?" The voice said, "I am a yaksha, a water spirit. Your brothers drank the water from my lake in spite of me asking them not to. That is why they are lying dead."

Yudhisthira said, "I am thirsty. Please let me have a drink of water." The Yaksha said, "I shall let you drink from my lake. But first you must answer my questions." Yudhisthira agreed so the yaksha asked his questions, and Yudhisthira answered.

**Yaksha:** What equals the ocean? Who is the mother of all human beings? What can compare with the brightness of the Sun?

Yudhisthira: The sky equals the ocean. The cow is the mother of all human beings. Only Truth equals the Sun in brightness.



Yaksha: How can one earn money? Of all the riches which is the best? What is true wealth?

Yudhisthira: Money can only be earned by hard work. Learning is the best of all riches. Health is wealth.

Yaksha: What is greater than the earth? What is higher than the skies?

Yudhisthira: A mother is greater than the earth. A father's importance is higher than the skies.

Yaksha: What is faster than the wind? What troubles a person always?

Yudhisthira: The mind is faster than the wind. Worry troubles a person always.

The yaksha said, "I am very pleased with your answers. I can grant that one of your brothers may come alive. Which brother do you want alive?" Yudhisthira replied, "Nakula."

The yaksha was surprised. "Why do you choose Nakula, when you can choose the brave Bhima or the bright Arjuna?"

Yudhisthira said, “Yaksha, I have two mothers. Yudhisthira who belongs to Kunti is alive. But both the sons of my mother Madri are dead. It is unfair that I should ask life for Bhima or Arjuna when my step mother Madri remains childless.”

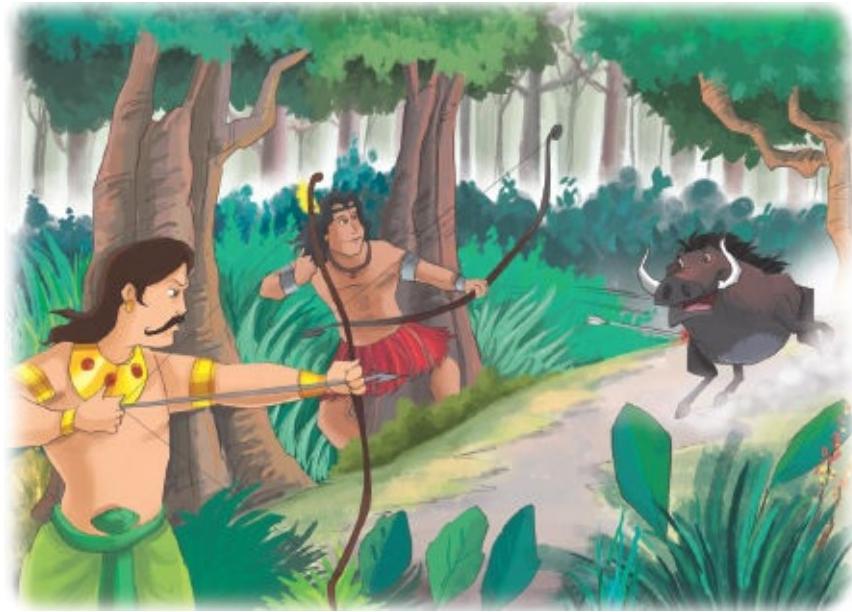
The yaksha truly admired Yudhisthira’s wisdom and virtue. It said, “Dear Yudhisthira, may all your brothers come to life. Drink to your fill from my lake and help your brothers too to quench their thirst.” Yudhisthira asked for the yaksha’s blessings. The Pandavas drank to their fill from the lake and later caught the deer and brought back the arani sticks to the sage, as they had promised.

## Pashupata The Divine Weapon

**P**ashupata was the divine weapon that belonged to Lord Shiva. Once, Arjuna had travelled to Mount Kailasha and engaged himself in tough penance to please Lord Shiva so that the Lord may bless him with the weapon Pashupata. But Lord Shiva did not want to part with the Pashupata so easily. He decided to test Arjuna's devotion.

Lord Shiva dressed as a hunter and went to the place where Arjuna lived. There he saw that Arjuna was aiming at a wild boar which was about to attack him. Lord Shiva took the opportunity and shot an arrow towards the boar. His arrow hit the boar at the same time as Arjuna's arrow did. The boar died.

Arjuna was very disturbed that some other hunter had hit the boar he was aiming at. He said, "It is indeed unfair that you should kill the boar that I was aiming at. I must challenge you to a fight. If you win, you may have the boar." Arjuna did not know the real identity of the hunter. He was a great warrior. A huge fight broke out between Lord Shiva who was disguised as a hunter and Arjuna. It went on for a long time. Lord Shiva had limitless energy but Arjuna began to grow tired. He said, "Let me rest for a while and pray to Lord Shiva so that I regain my strength quickly. Please allow me some time." The hunter agreed and Arjuna made an idol of Lord Shiva with clay and placed a garland of flowers around his neck.



Suddenly a miracle happened. The garland Arjuna had placed around the idol's neck disappeared and appeared around the hunter's neck. Arjuna understood that the hunter was no one but Lord Shiva himself. He fell at Lord Shiva's feet and asked him for forgiveness. Lord Shiva came back to his original form and blessed Arjuna. He said, "You have displayed your greatness as a warrior. I am also very happy with your devotion. Here is Pashupata, the divine weapon. Use it wisely."



Arjuna received the Pashupata and bowed to Lord Shiva. Seeing this, many gods came down from the sky. Arjuna also received weapons from Yama, the god of death, Varuna, the god of waters and Kubera, the god of wealth. Then Indra invited Arjuna to spend a few days at his celestial palace. When Arjuna reached Indra's palace, he was amazed at its beauty. He remained there for some days during which he took lessons in the art of dancing from Chitrasen.

Urvashi, a heavenly maiden, fell in love with Arjuna while he lived in the palace. She came to him one day and said, "O' prince, I am fallen in love with your handsome face and virtuous nature." Arjuna was shocked to hear this. Urvashi was blessed with eternal beauty and endless youth. But Arjuna said, "That is not possible. I have always regarded you as my mother. Please do not utter such words. It is a sin."

This hurt Urvashi very much. Angry at Arjuna she said, "So my beauty which mesmerizes even the gods is not enough for you? I curse you Arjuna, you shall spend a year of your life as a person who is neither a man nor a woman. Then you will understand what a woman feels when she is rejected."

But Urvashi was also impressed by Arjuna's virtue. When she calmed down, she said, "You shall be able to choose, when you want the curse to take effect."

Arjuna accepted the curse from Urvashi and bowed to her. Then he returned to his brothers who were waiting for him in the forest.

## Rishi Durvasa and Pandavas

Rishi Durvasa was known for his terrible temper. He would often curse anyone who offended him. He also had ten thousand disciples who followed him everywhere. He taught them and kept them under strict discipline.

When the Pandavas began their exile in the forest, Yudhishtira was worried because he was often unable to feed the holy sages and others who would come to visit him. Once he met Dhaumya, the priest of the Pandavas. Yudhisthira said, "We live in the forest and have hardly enough food to feed ourselves. How will I be able to feed the holy sages who visit us often? But it is a sin not to treat one's guests well. Tell me, what do I do?"

Dhaumya said, "Pray to Sun god. He provides life to everyone on the Earth. He will be able to solve your problem." So Yudhisthira prayed to the Sun god for help. Pleased with his prayers, the Sun God blessed the Pandava prince with the magical vessel called Akshaya Paatra. The Sun god said, "This vessel shall provide you with unlimited amount of food. Draupadi, the virtuous wife, always eats only after she has fed everyone in her household. Only after she has eaten shall the Akshaya Paatra be empty."



One day the Pandavas and Draupadi had all eaten their meal, and washed the

vessels too, when Rishi Durvasa and his pupils came to the ashrama. The Pandavas received them with all honour. The Rishi said, "We are all very hungry. Please keep some food ready for us. We shall return soon after we have had a bath in the river and said our prayers."

The Pandavas were in a fix. They had no food left. The Akshaya Paatra had just been emptied. If they did not feed the Rishi and his pupils, he would surely curse them all.

Draupadi began to pray to Lord Krishna. She knew that only he could save them from being cursed by Rishi Durvasa. At her prayers, Lord Krishna appeared. Draupadi who saw the Lord as her elder brother said, "O' Keshava, we are in deep trouble. Rishi Durvasa had just arrived with his ten thousand disciples and they have asked us to keep some food ready as they are very hungry. I have just finished eating and the Akshaya Paatra will not give us any more food. Help us, or we shall all be cursed."



Krishna smiled. He said, "Where is the Rishi and his disciples?" Draupadi told him that they had gone to the river to bathe. Krishna said, "Bring the Akshaya Paatra to me." Draupadi said, "But, it is empty!" Krishna assured her not to worry about that. When Draupadi brought the magic vessel to him, Krishna picked a grain of rice that was sticking to the bottom of the vessel and chewed it with satisfaction. Then he said, "Aah! I feel so full. I have never had a heartier meal, may the Lord bless you." Draupadi stood there in surprise as Krishna

disappeared.

Soon the Rishi and his disciples returned from the river. He said to Draupadi, "Child, I feel so full of food so do my disciples. Please lay some mats so that we may all rest."

Draupadi understood that Lord Krishna had saved her honour again. She thanked the Lord for this miracle.

## The Pandavas in Virata Nagar

The Pandavas spent twelve years in the forest. Their thirteenth year was to be spent in disguise as it was ordered by Duryodhana after the game of dice. They decided to spend the day in the kingdom ruled by king Virata as he was an enemy of the Kauravas. So the Pandavas thought that it would be difficult for the Kauravas to look for them in an enemy kingdom.

The Pandavas presented themselves before king Virat. Yudhisthira introduced himself as Kankabhatta, a learned Brahmin. Because Yudhisthira was so well read in the scriptures, the king appointed him as the court priest and his advisor. Bhima, because he was so fond of food introduced himself as Valala, the cook. Thus, the king appointed him as his royal cook. Arjuna, was destined for Urvashi's curse to take effect. He became a person who was neither man nor woman and took the name Brihannala, the dance teacher. The lessons in dancing that Arjuna had taken from Chitrasen helped, when the king was astonished by his dancing skills appointed him as the dance teacher for princess Uttara.

Nakula introduced himself as Granthika and was appointed as the master of stables and Sahadeva as Arishtanemi became the chief cowherd. Draupadi called herself Sairandhri and was appointed as Queen Sudeshna's chambermaid. Thus, the Pandavas and Draupadi began to live in disguise in Virata Nagar, safe from the Kauravas.



But their peace was not to last. Queen Sudeshna's brother Keechaka, who was the commander in chief of the King's army, saw Draupadi and fell in love with her. He began to hover around her whenever he got a chance and would persuade her to marry him. He thought she was a common maid who served the queen. Draupadi was growing tired of Keechaka's misbehavior. One day, she told Bhima everything about it. Bhima asked her not to worry. He said, "Tell Keechaka that you shall be waiting for him in your room tonight. Ask him to come without being seen by anyone else."



That night Keechaka crept into Draupadi's room. He noticed that Draupadi was lying on her bed. He went to pull the sheets when suddenly instead of Draupadi, he found Bhima lying on the bed. Bhima was waiting for Keechaka in Draupadi's room. Keechaka was no match for him and was killed instantly.

Next morning, everyone grieved over the dead Keechaka. Draupadi told them how some unknown man had killed him while he was trying to misbehave with Draupadi. Everyone seemed to believe her. However, when the news reached Duryodhana, he was certain that the Pandavas were hiding in Virata Nagar and it was none other than Bhima who had killed Keechaka.

Duryodhana waged a war on Virata Nagar. King Virat, without his commander of the armies, did not know what to do. Then the Pandavas offered to fight. King Virat agreed. But Arjuna had to stay behind because women were not allowed to fight in the battlefield and he was still under the curse of Urvashi.

When everyone had gone to war, Arjuna found the crown prince Uttar, sitting sadly in his room. Arjuna said, "Why do you sit here like a coward, you must be fighting in the battlefield." The prince said, "I am not a coward. I do not have a charioteer. How am I supposed to fight?" Arjuna offered to drive the prince's chariot. They set off for the battlefield.

On the way Arjuna stopped the chariot. Brought down his bow and arrow from a tree, where he had hidden them and asked Uttar to take his position as the charioteer. Young Uttar looked on in astonishment. Arjuna blew his conch as he went to war. He killed many of the Kaurava armies and won the battle single-handedly. Duryodhana understood, it was Arjuna but he could not do anything, because the thirteenth year of the Pandavas' exile had ended with the end of the war.

People of Virata Nogara were overjoyed. King Virat swore allegiance to the Pandavas and blessed them. The Pandavas

## Krishna Comes on Pandavas Side

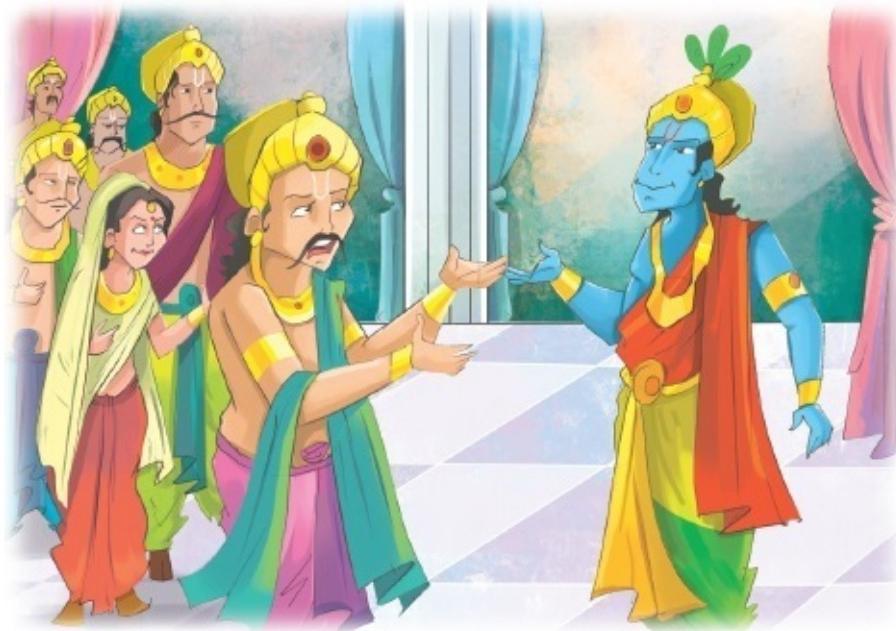
When the thirteenth year of their exile ended, the Pandavas began to think. They could not go back to Hastinapura, because they knew, Duryodhana would never return their share of the kingdom. So Pandavas along with Draupadi decided to go to Panchal where Krishna visited them.

He said, "You must take what is yours. You are the rightful heir to the throne of Hastinapur. If Duryodhana refuses to give you Hastinapur, you must take it from him by force. He has insulted your wife and has exiled you in an unfair way. He deserves to be punished. It is now time for war."

Yudhisthira said, "I understand Keshava, but I do not want to fight against my own cousins. Let us give the Kauravas a chance to settle this peacefully."

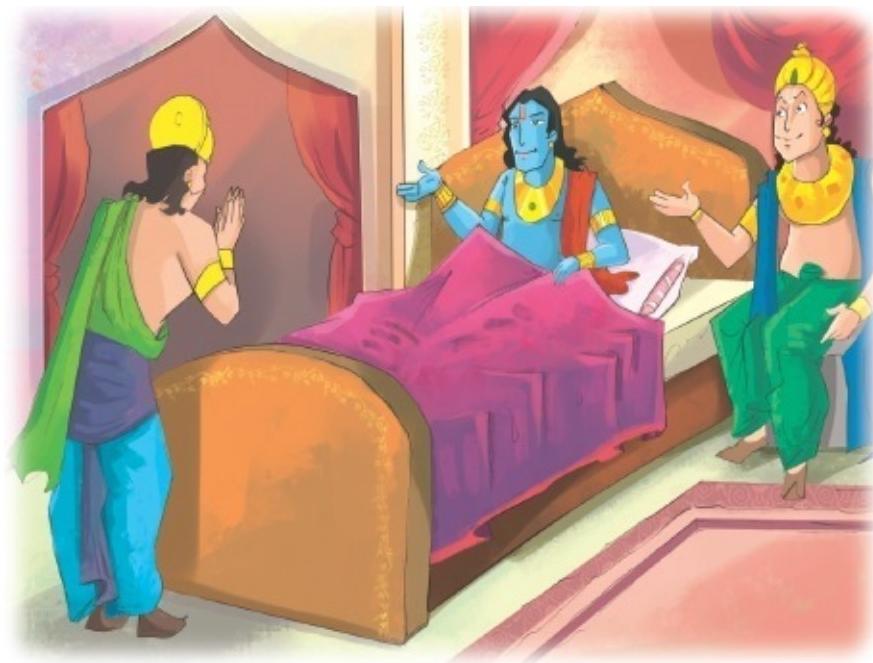
Krishna said, "You are indeed noble. But we must prepare for war because Duryodhana is blinded by his wish for power. He will not agree without a war."

The Pandavas took Krishna's advice. A messenger was sent to convince Duryodhana. As it was expected Duryodhana did not accept the proposal for peace. He declared that he was ready for war instead.



Both the sides began gathering their allies by sending messengers to various kings. Krishna was an ally. Arjuna himself went to Dwarka to ask for his support. When Duryodhana's spies alerted him about this, Shakuni advised him to rush to Dwarka and ask for Krishna's support, before Arjuna gets a chance. So Duryodhana too went to Dwarka to talk to Krishna.

In Dwarka, Duryodhana reached before Arjuna. He was led to Krishna's bedroom where he found Krishna sound asleep. Duryodhana sat on a seat which was placed at the head of Krishna's bed. Arjuna, who came a little later, sat down at the foot of the bed.



When Krishna woke up, he saw Arjuna sitting at his feet. Then he saw Duryodhana. Krishna said, "Indeed, I am delighted to see you. What brings you here so early in the morning?" Duryodhana said, "The war against the Pandavas must take place. You are the ruler of the great kingdom of Dwarka and related to both the Pandavas and Kauravas. I have come to ask for your support in the war. Since I was here first, O' Krishna, promise me that you shall fight on the Kauravas' side."

Krishna smiled. He said, "I shall help both of you. But I must tell you, that I have vowed that I shall not pick up a weapon or fight in the war. I shall let each of you pick either my famous Narayani sena, the divine army which consists of one million powerful warriors or me. You might have been here first,

Duryodhana, but I saw Arjuna before I saw you. So I must let Arjuna choose first.”

Duryodhana was very angry when he heard this but he could do nothing. He desperately wanted to get Krishna’s Narayani Sena. He thought, “What good is Krishna if he would not fight in the war. I must have the Narayani sena. But Arjuna is getting to choose first now. Coming to Dwarka would be such a waste if he decides to have the Narayani sena.”

But to Duryodhana’s great surprise, Arjuna fell at Krishna’s feet with tears in his eyes. He said, “O’ Keshava, I choose you even if you do not fight. With you on our side, we shall come to no harm. It is your guidance that I seek.”

Duryodhana was glad that he could have Krishna’s Narayani Sena. He bowed and left with happiness in his heart. He did not realize that victory could not go against Krishna. Thus, with Duryodhana’s foolish choice that day, the fate of the Kauravas was sealed.

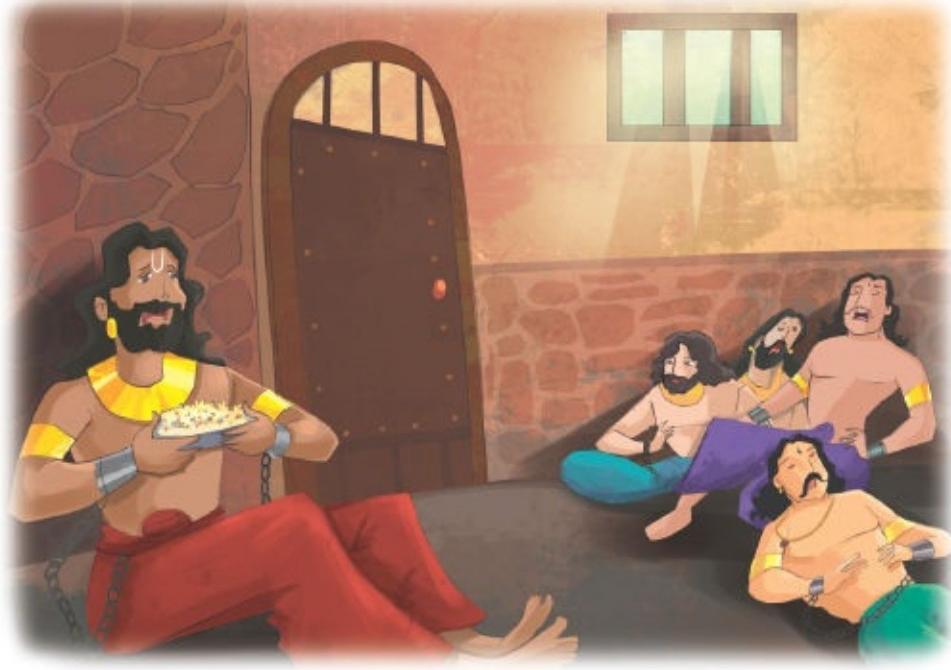
## Story of Shakuni

Shakuni was the prince of Gandhar. He had hundred brothers and a sister called Gandhari. King Subala of Gandhar had got his daughter married to Dhritarashtra. When Shakuni learnt that his sister had been married to a blind prince, he was very angry at Bhishma for it was Bhishma who had brought the marriage proposal to King Subala. King Subala was able to refuse Bhishma as Bhishma belonged to Hastinapur, one of the most powerful kingdoms.

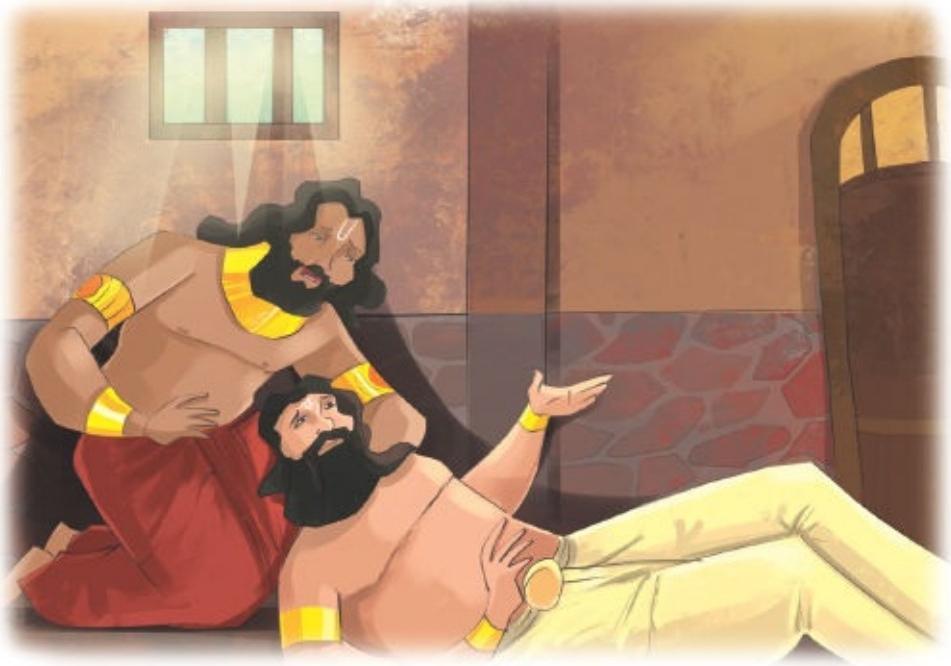
Gandhari's astrological charts showed that her first husband was destined to die. The King was much disturbed when the priests told him about this. Then it was decided that Gandhari would be married to a goat and when the goat died, she would be fit to marry a prince.

Thus, a goat was arranged and the princess was married to it. Then the priests killed the goat and performed a ceremony. Later that year, Gandhari was married to Dhritarashtra, the prince of Hastinapur.

However, years after marriage, when Dhritarashtra came to know about this he was very unhappy. Angry at having married a widow, he captured King Subala and his hundred sons. King Subala and his hundred sons were kept in a dark prison and fed on a handful of rice every day. One by one all of King Subala's sons began to die. The king cried, "Dhritarashtra, I curse you, one day you too shall feel the sorrow of losing your sons. Your sons too will be destroyed before your eyes and you would not be able to do anything to save them."



The princes of Gandhar decided that they would give their share of rice to the youngest prince so that at least one of them survives. Then he would rise to take revenge for the cruelty that Dhritarashtra had shown to King Subala. Thus, Shakuni, who was the youngest of the hundred sons, was fed on all the rice. He lived while his brothers and father slowly died of hunger.



Before he died, King Subala said to Shakuni, "Son, take revenge for the deaths

of your father and your brothers. Make a dice out of my thigh bone. The dice would always listen to you. It will make you never lose a game of dice. May you bring as much pain to Dhritarashtra as he has inflicted upon us. My blessings shall always be with you.”

King Subala died and Shakuni swore that he shall do as his father had asked him. When Shakuni was released from prison, he went to live with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari.

He made friends with Duryodhana and poisoned his mind against his cousins, the Pandavas.

It was Shakuni’s magical dice which made the Pandavas lose the game of dice with Duryodhana and thus were forced them to leave their kingdom and live in the forest for thirteen years.

Duryodhana began to trust his maternal uncle Shakuni and he never liked the Pandavas from a very young age. Thus, when the great war of Kurukshetra was fought, Shakuni played an important role in causing it. He succeeded in his mission when all the Kauravas including Duryodhana were killed in the war along with all those who supported them.



## Bhishma

Through he was fighting for the Kauravas, Duryodhana felt that Bhishma was doing it half-heartedly. Bhishma loved the Pandavas dearly. But he had vowed that he would always serve the king of Hastinapur. So he fought for the Kauravas. But Bhishma was takings care not to kill any of the Pandavas. Duryodhana thought, “What is the point of having a commander-in-chief who would not kill any of the Pandavas.”

When Bhishma learnt of this, it made him very angry to know that Duryodhana did not have faith in him. On the third day of the battle, Bhishma arranged his army in an eagle format and attacked the Pandavas. The Pandava army was torn apart. Scores of men died that day trying to attack the mighty Bhishma. Bhishma’s many arrows hit Arjuna and injured him.

Krishna could not bear it. He thought, “If this continues, the Pandavas will be defeated soon.” So as Bhishma, having lost his self control due to his anger, fought against the Pandavas, Krishna lifted a wheel of a broken chariot and ran towards Bhishma to put an end to his life.

But when Bhishma saw Krishna charging towards him he dropped his weapons and with folded hands he said, “I am so lucky that the Lord of the Universe has decided to make me free from this world. O’ Madhava, let me die by your hands. I have no wish to live anymore.”



Krishna stopped when he heard Bhishma. He remembered he had vowed not to pick up a weapon in the battle. He threw down the wheel and walked back to Arjuna's chariot. The Lord had broken his vow for his devotee.

On the tenth day of the war, Krishna advised Arjuna to use Shikhandi as a shield while he fought with Bhishma. Bhishma had vowed that he shall never marry or have children. Once, when his step-brother, Vichitravirya, fell in love with Amba, the princess of Kashi, Bhishma had forcefully brought her to Hastinapur to get her married to his brother. However, when Vichitravirya learnt that Amba was in love with someone else, he refused to marry her. Then Amba asked Bhishma to marry her but Bhishma could not because he was under the vow.



Mad with anger Amba vowed to take her revenge by killing Bhishma. She went to the forest and engaged in a tough penance upon which Lord Shiva blessed her that she would turn into a man. Thus, Amba began to be known as Shikhandi.

In the great war of Kurukshetra Shikhandi was fighting for the Pandavas. Krishna knew that Bhishma knew that Shikhandi was Amba. So when Shikhandi came before Bhishma that day, he dropped his weapons and said, "I shall not fight with a woman. Amba, I am truly sorry for what I have done. Please forgive me."

On Krishna's gesture, Arjuna took this opportunity and shot hundreds of arrows at Bhishma. The arrows pierced through Bhishma's body. He fell to the ground. But as he fell, his body did not touch the ground. The arrows made a bed for him and he lay on it as Yudhisthira, Bhima, Duryodhana, Kama, Kripa, all warriors from both the Pandavas' as well as the Kauravas' side gathered around him. Bhishma said, "Arjuna, I am thankful for this hero's bed that you have presented me. But my head is hurting because it has no support. Please give me a pillow." Arjuna shot two arrows. The arrows slid past Bhishma's head and supported his head without hurting him a bit.

Next, Bhishma asked for some water. Duryodhana sent his men to fetch some water. Bhishma said, "My son, the water you are offering me is not the water I want." Then he looked at Arjuna again. Arjuna shot an arrow to the ground. Suddenly a stream of water sprang from the ground to Bhishma's mouth.

It was the river Ganga, Bhishma's mother. It satisfied him as he felt close to his mother. Bhishma looked at Krishna with great joy. He said, "I bow to you, my Master. You are the Lord of all the worlds. I am tired of this life. The truth shall win this war and I am happy. I must leave the earth now."

Bhishma was blessed by his father that he would die when he wished. So as he lay on his bed of arrows, he kept waiting for Uttarayana Punyakala, an auspicious day. It was believed that on the day of Uttarayana Punyakala the doors of Vaikuntha, where Lord Vishnu lives, is thrown open and the souls leaving the earth can see the Lord. Bhishma died when Uttarayana Punyakala arrived. His soul then made its way to heaven.

## Gandhari Curses Krishna

After the great war of Kurukshetra was over, Krishna walked into the battlefield where the women sat, crying over their dead husbands, fathers and sons. Gandhari was trying to calm them while she grieved for the loss of her sons.

She was unable to find words to console the women, when Krishna walked to her and bowed to her respectfully.

When Gandhari saw Krishna, she said, "You are the cause of death of my sons. You could have prevented the war but you did not. As a result the Kurus have been almost wiped out. I curse you that you too shall die like an animal while your clan of Vrishnis will be wiped out as they fight amongst themselves."

Krishna smiled gently and said, "Mother, you have relieved me of a burden. My clan cannot be destroyed by anyone in this world except by themselves. Lately, they have grown to be very sinful and greedy. You have solved my problem for it is only fitting that they fight amongst themselves and kill each other. As to my death, I accept your curse by way of your blessings." Gandhari calmed down when she heard Krishna, though the grief of seeing all her son's dead still overwhelmed her.



Her curse took effect when sages, Vishvamitra, Kanya and Narada went to visit Dwarka. A group of young Vishni boys dressed one of themselves as a woman and hid a mace in his dress. Then they took the boy to the sages and asked, "This woman is about to have a baby. Kindly tell us if it will be a boy or a girl."

The sages soon understood that this was a mischief. They felt they had been insulted. So they cursed, "Whatever the boy is hiding under his dress will be the cause of destruction of this clan." When Balarama heard this he quickly took the mace and ground it into a powder before throwing it in the sea.



While he did this some pieces broke off from the mace. Balarama threw away those pieces too. Now, one day the Vishnis went for a picnic at the seaside. A fight broke out between them. Some seaweed were growing by the seaside which they pulled out to strike each other with. The seaweeds had grown out of the powder of the mace. They were long and sharp. Soon all the Vishnis died and so brought an end to the clan.

Balarama could not bear the sorrow of having lost his men. He went to the seaside and gave up his body. It is said that he converted into a large black snake with five heads and drowned himself into the sea. Balarama is said to have been an incarnation of Lord Vishnu's faithful follower, Sheshnaag.

Krishna too could not bear the loss of his men and his brother. He went to the forest and climbed a tree. There, in his sorrow, he was sitting on a branch when a hunter mistook him for a bird and shot an arrow towards him. The arrow pierced

Krishna's foot and Krishna died from the wound. The hunter had made the arrow from the pieces of the mace that Balarama had thrown away. This way the curse of Gandhari and the sages, came true. So ended Lord Krishna's life and he went back to his heavenly abode.



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